The Confessions of a German Deserter

Written by a Prussian Officer Who Participated in the Ravaging and Pillaging of Belgium

FOREWORD

This is a true story of the invasion of Belgium and northern France at the beginning of the world war, written by an officer of the German army who took part in the mad rush toward Paris. Sickened by the atrocities committed upon civilians and soldiers, he deserted after several months' service and finally made his way to the United States. His disclosure of the unspeakable cruelties perpetrated by the German soldiers, under orders from their officers, is one of the most sensational documents the war has produced.

CHAPTER I.

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I am a German soldier. Naturally at the time when the war started we did not know that there would be such a war as is being waged today.

Daily we soldiers were told that France and Russia wanted to attack us and that the kaiser was doing everything possible for our protection. Already on July 20 we were armed to the teeth and prepared to march away. During these preparations, which showed us all that war had to come, 18 men of my company deserted.

The government published, during this time, bulletins almost hourly to prepare the people for the war, a subterfuge that succeeded perfectly. Consequently two days before war was declared, the people were overwhelmingly for war, but they were certain that it was only to be between Germany and France.

Of the intervention of Belgium, Russia, England and Italy, the country had as little thought as it did of any participation of the United States. All thought only of the promenade to Paris, which, to the disappointment of the people, and also, surely to the disappointment of the autocracy, has been longer drawn out than had been wished for.

In these days of uncertainty the soldiers, contrary to the cruel treatment which they had experienced before, were treated liberally with great quantities of supplies, delicacies and beer, so that most of the soldiers were so drunk continuously that they were unable to realize the seriousness of the situation.

And yet the majority of the soldiers could not be enthused over the war. They cheered and were enthusiastic because they knew it was the orders. On July 31, 1914, one day before the declaration of war, we left, after being brought to war strength, for our garrison at Mainz-am-Rheine.

Where the enemy toward which we were to point our bayonets was we had not the slightest idea. All we did know was that we had to be transported somewhere to protect the border.

There were stirring times as we started out. Tens of thousands of people threw flowers at us and all wanted to shake hands. All—even soldiers—cried! Many embraced, their wives or young brides. The bands played farewell songs and people laughed and cried all at the same time. Strangers embraced and kissed each other. "A veritable witch's holiday" of emotion was loosened and engulfed the populace like a storm. No one, not even the strongest, could resist its powers. Yet even this was surpassed by the leave-taking at the depot, where last farewells had to be said. This scene will never leave me! How desperately many women clung to their men! Many had to be forcibly removed.

But this was at last done and then we were placed in cattle cars. Night came and we had no lights. The train went slowly toward the Rhine. It went smoothly enough. Our company, which had had days of great excitement, welcomed the rest that the journey afforded. Most of the soldiers slept with their knapsacks as pillows. Others looked dreamily into the future. Still others secretly pulled pictures from their breastpockets and only a very few killed time by discussion and comment on their possible destination.

"Where are we going?" Yes, where? No one knew. Then after endless hours, the train stopped. We were in Duren. What were we there for? We did not know. The officers only shrugged their shoulders at our questions.

After a brief pause we went ahead. On the evening of August 1 we reached a farmyard near Duren. Our company was billeted in a barn. No one knew what we had to do. Ignorant of the purpose of our being sent so near the Belgian border we laid down on our beds of straw. Something had to happen soon to rescue us from this uncertainty.

How few suspected that would be the last night for many of us on German ground. An alarm took us from our beds at 3 a. m. The company gathered and the captain demonstrated the war situation. As to the direction of the march he himself was ignorant.

Scarcely half an hour later 50 big trucks drove up and stopped on the road before our quarters. The drivers also were ignorant and waited for orders. Discussion of our destination started afresh. The orderlies who had been keeping their ears open said we would enter Belgium that day. Others contradicted them, no one knew for certainty.

But the order to march did not come and in the evening we went back to our straw. But the rest was short. At 1 a. m. we were again aroused and honored by a speech from our captain. He said we were at war with Belgium. He told us to show ourselves brave, deserve the iron cross and bring honor to Germany. Then he continued:

"We only make war against the armed force, the Belgian army. Life and property of civilians are protected under international law. Yet you soldiers must not forget to keep your lives for the fatherland or sell them as

Honored by a Speech From Our Captain.

dearly as possible. Unnecessary shedding of blood we will prohibit to the civilian population. Yet I ask you to consider that too much consideration borders on cowardice and that will be punished very severely."

After this speech of our captain we were loaded on our autos and at 4 a. m. crossed the border into Belgium. In order to make this a historical occasion we were ordered to give three cheers. On the speedy autos we reached our goal at 10 a. m. It was a beautiful little rural village. Inhabitants of the villages we had passed looked at us in astonishment, so that we all got the impression that these country people never knew why we came to Belgium. They were frightened out of their sleep and looked out at us from their windows.

As we halted and left our autos, the farmers came out and offered us coffee, bread, meat, etc. We were still without a field kitchen, so that we enjoyed the enemy's offerings more so since those of the better class of villagers refused any pay. They told us the Belgian soldiers had departed to some unknown destination.

After a short rest we marched on. The autos returned. Hardly had we marched an hour when we were overtaken by cavalry, dragoons and hussars, who reported that the Germans were marching all over the neighborhood on all roads. Right behind came the bicycle corps.

This was comforting. We no longer felt alone, isolated in a strange country. Another bicycle division overtook us and passed on. Angry words were now uttered by members of our company. The others could ride but we had to walk. What we had always taken for granted suddenly became great injustice. If it did no good our grumbling at least was a diversion from the weight of our packs.

The heat was oppressive. The sweat came from all pores. The new and stiff leather trappings rubbed us sore, especially upon our hips. It was a relief at 2 p. m. to halt at an abandoned farm and rest on the grass. We might have lain down about ten minutes when suddenly we heard firing. We jumped up like lightning and hurried to our guns. The firing which was about three kilometers away grew more lively. At once we were on the march again.

From the expressions on the faces of the soldiers we could read the minds of the men. Something took possession of them which they had never experienced before. As for myself I became very restless. Fright and curiosity lashed my brain. Everything whirled around in my head and my heart was beating wildly. But I strove to conceal my fright from my comrades. I am sure that I tried energetically. I don't know that I succeeded better than my companions.

Although I knew we would be in the fight in an hour, I tried to persuade myself that our interference would not be necessary. I clung tightly to everything which might strengthen this hope.

The bicycles lying in the road indicated that the bicycle division was in the fight at this point. How strong the enemy was we did not know as we raced toward the firing line. Everybody crouched down as low as possible while jumping to the right and left. Before and behind us the bullets were flying continuously, yet we reached the firing line without losses. We were greeted joyously by our hard-pressed comrades. The bicycle regiment had not suffered any losses except for a few slightly wounded men who were still able to take part in the fight.

We were lying flat on the ground and firing in the direction ordered for all we were worth, even though we had not seen our enemies. That was apparently not interesting enough to some of our soldiers. They wanted to know how the people were looking whom they had to shoot at. They got up to a kneeling position. Two men of my company had to pay for their curiosity with their lives almost instantly. The first victim of our party went down without a sound. The second threw his arms high in the air and fell on his back. Both were dead instantly.

It is impossible for me to describe the feeling that overcame me in the first real volley as we advanced and came directly within the range of the fire. I no longer felt any fright, only an impulse to get into action as quickly as possible. Yet at the sight of the first corpse a terrible fear seized me. For minutes I was completely stunned, lost all self-control and was absolutely unable to think or do anything.

I pressed my face and hands close to the ground. I wanted to clutch my gun and shoot blindly. Presently I calmed down. I suddenly became contented with myself and conditions about me and when soon afterward the command was sounded along the whole line, "Spring out!" "Forward march!" I charged as did everyone else like one possessed. The order to halt followed. Like wet bags we plumped to the ground. Firing had begun anew.

Our firing now became more lively momentarily and increased to a fearful loudness. If we had occasion to say anything to our comrades we had to shout so loudly in their ears that it hurt our throats.

Under the effect of our fire the enemy grew restless, the fire weakened and his line wavered. As only 500 meters separated us from them we could observe exactly what happened there. We saw about half the enemy retire in the following manner: Every other man quit the line, leaving his alternate in his place. Those remaining held on until the retiring party halted. We used this moment to inflict the most severe losses on the retreating enemy. As far as we could scan the horizon to the right and left we saw the Germans advancing in several sectors. Also for our detachments the order came to advance as the enemy retreated.

The task of clinging to the heels of the retiring enemy so tenaciously that no time would be allowed to make a new stand fell to us. We followed the Belgians, scarcely stopping to breathe on the way, in order to prevent their fortifying themselves in a village situated just ahead. We knew that a bloody house-to-house fight lay before us, yet the Belgians never attempted to establish themselves, but managed to escape with astonishing cleverness.

In the meantime we received re-enforcements. Our company was now pretty well scattered and fought with whatever unit was nearby. The body I joined had to remain in the village to search systematically for scattered soldiers. From this village we saw that the Germans had gained on all sides. Field artillery, machine gun detachments and other equipment arrived and we were all astonished at their coming so quickly.

The Zeppelins and the 42-centimeter guns of the Germans—giant guns whose existence was unknown even to the kaiser's soldiers—rain death and destruction upon the Belgian cities which dare to resist the invader. The next installment tells the story of the fall of Liege and the plundering of other Belgian cities.

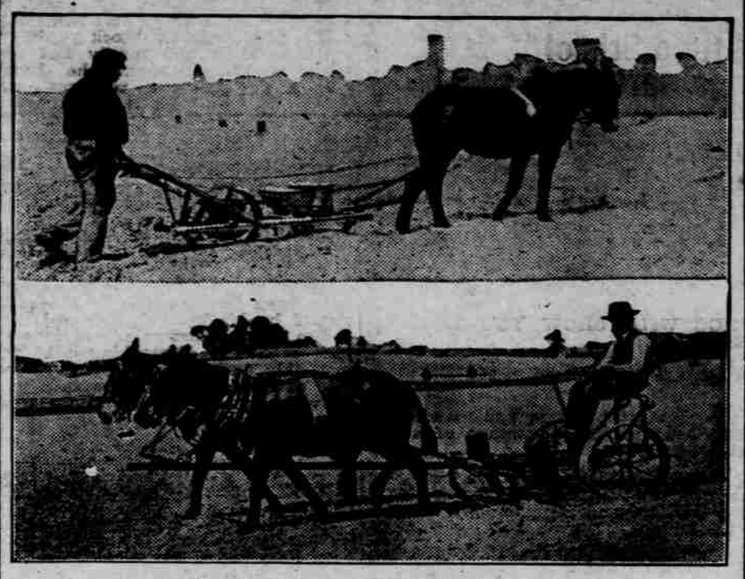
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Honorable retreats are in no war inferior to brave charges.

Our Part in Feeding the Nation

(Special Information Service, United States Department of Agriculture.)

MAKING MAN LABOR COUNT FOR MORE



Larger Implement Increases Work One Man Can Do.

MACHINERY AIDS LABOR SHORTAGE

Use of Modern Implements Is One Way to Increase Crops in Time of Emergency.

AIDS EFFICIENCY OF WORKER

United States Department of Agriculture Recommends That Farmers Co-operate in Purchase of Various Farm Outfits.

Work which is generally done in some part of the country with the aid of machines that greatly increase the efficiency of the man employed is still largely done by hand in other parts. Machinery for the most of the work in connection with preparing and tilling the soil is available in many sizes, and frequently two or more outfits, each requiring the time of one man, are seen working in the same field on operations for which implements of two or three times the size of those used could be employed with just as satisfactory results. There are few farm horses which a driver of ordinary intelligence cannot train to work in large teams in a few days' time, and most of the larger implements are little if any more complicated or difficult to handle than the small ones for the same work.

Machinery Profitable.

Where the farm is large, and it is not possible to procure sufficient labor, specialists of the United States department of agriculture say it is more profitable, as well as patriotic, to install machinery which will enable the operator to plant, cultivate, and harvest a full acreage of the crops best suited to his land and the needs of his country, than to let some of the land lie idle, or, at best, have it prepared and worked poorly, and the crops out of season.

In Farmers' Bulletin 989, "Better Use of Man Labor on the Farm," just issued by the United States department of agriculture, photographs of actual farm scenes are printed to show that in many cases work can be doubled by the use of larger implements and greater motive power, and sometimes the gain is considerably more than that. If the nature of the work and the machinery for doing it are such that the best implements will increase the efficiency of the worker by only 50 or 75 per cent their use may make possible an increase in acreage by just that amount and at least will enable the farmer to do his work in less time and allow him to take better advantage of good weather if the season is unfavorable

Combining to Purchase Machinery.

Can all farmers afford to buy extra horses and larger implements to save man labor? Of course those whose farms require but one or two horses to do the ordinary work seldom can afford to do so. But they can secure this additional help by combining to purchase larger machinery, and doubling up their teams to operate it; or one, usually more skilled in operating machinery, or better able to purchase it, may own the larger implements, and do the work for several neighbor farmers, besides his own, to the advantage of all concerned. Both these methods have been tried out in many localities with mowers, harvesters, tractors, thrashing machines, and other farm machinery.

How Rats Migrate.

Migrations of rats from one locality to another probably are due chiefly to food conditions, say investigators of the United States department of agriculture. After years in which the nests are comparatively scarce in a rural neighborhood they suddenly become exceedingly abundant and destructive. Rats migrate from places where food is scarce to places where it is plentiful. Abundant food in the new locality causes abnormal reproduction, the effect of which in a short time is that of a sudden invasion by a vast horde of rats.

Other movements of rats are local and seasonal in occurrence. An exodus takes place every spring from cities and villages to river banks and farmsteads in the surrounding country, and is followed by a return migration in the autumn. This phenomenon, which has been observed almost everywhere, explains why rats are more abundant in towns during the cold season and in larger numbers in the country during the summer.

That all rodent destruction is properly the business of the community, and that this must be recognized before substantial progress is made, is asserted by the department investigators.

INVESTING IN MACHINERY

If two men, driving one horse each, can combine the two horses into one team which one man can drive, and this team can do as much or more work than the two did singly, isn't it wise to combine them and save one man's time?

And if the farm is large and conditions warrant, isn't it wise to combine two of these two-horse teams into one, and save another man's time?

But before making these extra investments it is wise for the farmer to consider well the cost and the probable gain. If extra horses and implements cost more than they will produce, of course it would be unwise to make the investment.

Maple Sugar Value Grows.

The value of the national production of maple sugar and maple sirup has grown from $2,600,000 in 1899, when the census first ascertained it, to $12,000,000 for 1918, according to the bureau of crop estimates, United States department of agriculture. The maple sugar and sirup of 1918 were worth five times the cranberry crop of 1917, one and one-third times the hop crop, three-fifths of the sorghum sirup made, one-half of the buckwheat or flaxseed or onion crop, one-third of the oranges, and one-quarter of the sugar beets.

The principal region of production extends from northwestern Ohio through New York to Vermont and includes parts of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Outside of this region there is production of importance in the mountain country beginning with the southern counties of Pennsylvania and extending through western Maryland into scattered localities in West Virginia, and also in parts of Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana.

Weeds Never Rest.

The weed fight is one of the standard routine operations on the farm, and it represents a large proportion of the labor necessary to produce crops. No other single feature of farming requires such universal and unceasing attention as do the weeds.

Results From Thinning.

Do not let the vegetables remain too thick in the row. Too many beets to the foot in the row is just as bad as weeds. Get the maximum results from your ground by thinning and good care.

Plan for Storage House.

Early this season plans should be made and executed in the building of suitable farm storage houses or cellars. This usually can be done at relatively low cost if undertaken in time.

For honey comb and cellar wintering an eight-frame hive is commonly preferred.

An Austrian travel bureau, with a capital of $300,000, has been organized, chiefly in preparation for post-war activity.

Familiar Name.

"Those who can speak French a little," says an American soldier writing from France, "are constantly asked questions by those who can't, such as, 'Why do they call so many dogs in France Ici?' One hates to tell them the reason is that 'ici' means 'here,' and of course in calling the dog they say, 'Here, here!'"—Outlook.

An English Failing.

"The fiends! The pitiless Hun barbarians!"

And Humorist Ring Lardner of Chicago tossed down his newspaper and rose and paced the floor with long, agitated strides, puffing feverishly the while on his cigarette.

"The Hun fiends!" he resumed. "Have they no chivalry, no compassion? Think of it—their latest device, when they are about to drop bombs on London, is to paint their Gothas all over with jokes, so that the English can't see them."

Make Fun of "Hymn of Hate."

"The German 'Hymn of Hate' bids fair to become one of England's national songs," writes Maj. Eric Fisher Wood in "The Notebook of an Intelligence Officer," "just as derisive 'Yankee Doodle,' first composed and played by the musicians of British troops early in the American revolution, was later, on the occasion of their final surrender at Yorktown, played at them by the bands of the Continental army and subsequently became one of America's national songs, having today a popularity rivaled only by 'Dixie.' It is truly an extraordinary sight to see a British regiment on the march singing the 'Hymn of Hate' at the top of their lungs and at the chorus to hear some clear tenor voice sing out, 'Whom do we hate?' and then the whole battalion's reply in a voice of thunder—'England.'"